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Viewing cable 05BOGOTA8406, CODEL COLEMAN MEETS WITH PRESIDENT URIBE

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05BOGOTA8406	2005-09-07 16:32	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Bogota

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.semana.com/wikileaks/Seccion/168.aspx>

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id: 40050
date: 9/7/2005 16:32
refid: 05BOGOTA8406
origin: Embassy Bogota
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination: 05BOGOTA8292
header:

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BOGOTA 008406

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/07/2015
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [CO](#) [CODEL](#)
SUBJECT: CODEL COLEMAN MEETS WITH PRESIDENT URIBE

REF: BOGOTA 8292

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. Senators Coleman and Martinez and Congressman Miller met with President Uribe on August 23 during a brief visit to Bogota. The CODEL told Uribe they had come to thank him personally for his leadership in the fight against drugs and terrorism, and for the vital U.S.-Colombian partnership. Uribe expressed gratitude for ongoing U.S. support. He also thanked the U.S. for supporting Ambassador Moreno's election to head the IDB. He proposed that the U.S. work with the IDB to set a new agenda for Latin America. Citing the resonance of Chavez's message and impact of his checkbook, growing anti-Americanism, and many upcoming elections in the region, Uribe said the time was right for a new approach. His formula was that: (1) Latin American countries pledge to comply with UN Millennium goals; (2) the IDB help countries comply; and (3) the U.S. strongly support the initiative. The economic and social components of the goals could effectively counter Chavez's populism. The CODEL agreed that a new effort was needed with more immediate results felt by the average person. The CODEL asked Uribe for his views on the region and Chavez. Uribe

said democracy was at risk. The opposition in Venezuela was weak, Evo Morales was gaining in the polls in Bolivia, Brazil's Lula was distracted, the liberal party in Nicaragua remained divided which could lead to Ortega's election, and President Fox's party in Mexico was also losing ground. While he trusted Ecuador's President Palacio, his government, too, was weak. Uribe said he handled relations with Venezuela carefully given its long border and significant commercial relationship. Senator Coleman said the demobilization of the paramilitaries and the new justice and peace law were of particular interest to the Congress. Uribe reviewed the state of play. While acknowledging the law was controversial, he insisted it was workable. For the first time Colombia had successfully introduced the principles of justice and reparations into a peace process. Uribe said he wanted rigorous, transparent implementation and thus hoped to form an international commission, led by former President Clinton, to monitor progress and provide constructive criticism. In response to a question on how Uribe would react to a negative constitutional court ruling on re-election, Uribe said he would work to elect a successor who continued the "fundamental lines" of his policy. Any action the people might urge him to consider beyond that would be in strict accordance with the constitution (e.g. a national referendum) and determined after the ruling. End Summary.

12. (C) On August 23, during a brief stopover in Bogota, Senators Norm Coleman and Mel Martinez and Representative Jeff Miller met with President Uribe at the airport. CODEL Coleman was accompanied by the Ambassador, two senate aides and polcouns (notetaker). Uribe was accompanied by Deputy Foreign Minister Camilo Reyes and MFA North American affairs director Francisco Gonzalez (notetaker). The meeting lasted about an hour. Uribe himself had just arrived from attending a funeral in Medellin and took off for Cartagena shortly after the CODEL departed for Orlando, Florida.

13. (C) Uribe opened by expressing gratitude on behalf of all Colombians for U.S. support in the fight against drugs and terrorism. We have not won but are winning, he said. He attributed recent progress to the courage of the Colombian people and sustained U.S. assistance. Senator Coleman remarked that progress was the result of Uribe's commitment and leadership. He said he and his colleagues stopped in Colombia to thank Uribe, and underscore appreciation for the vital U.S.-Colombian partnership. Senator Martinez agreed, also expressing appreciation for Uribe's leadership, and applauding Colombia as a great partner to the U.S., and Uribe as a beacon of hope for all who want peace, a better future and the rule of law.

14. (C) Coleman noted that the demobilization of paramilitaries and the new justice and peace law were of particular interest to the Congress, and emphasized the importance of rigorous and energetic implementation of the law to ensure a credible process. He asked about the recent meeting between President Bush and Uribe in Crawford. Uribe described the meeting as excellent and important for Colombians to witness the strong partnership with the U.S. In Uribe's view, such an event made Colombians feel safer and more optimistic about the future.

Ambassador Moreno Election to IDB

15. (C) Senators Coleman and Martinez expressed satisfaction with the election of Ambassador Moreno to the IDB presidency. Uribe said he was thankful to the U.S. and in particular to President Bush for his support of Moreno's candidacy. He cited the President's comments to President Fox as critical to securing Mexican support and putting Moreno over the top. Uribe was confident that Moreno would do an excellent job at the IDB and that his presence at the bank presented an opportunity for the region. Uribe proposed that the U.S. consider working with the IDB to set a new agenda for Latin America. Escalating oil prices were giving Chavez a powerful tool to pressure weaker countries in the region. Brazil was distracted by the corruption scandal. There were continuing accusations that Venezuela was trying to influence elections in Bolivia, and perhaps in Peru. There was growing anti-U.S. sentiment in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador. A new agenda for the region was needed and new IDB leadership could be a useful tool to help establish it.

16. (C) Coleman agreed that the trends in the region were worrying and that the IDB could be helpful in working to provide increasing economic stability.

17. (C) Uribe then elaborated a three-step process for a new regional agenda: (1) Latin American countries pledge to comply with the UN Millennium goals; (2) the IDB declares that its main focus will be to help Latin countries meet these goals; and (3) the U.S. follows with strong support for

the initiative, with a public declaration that Latin American countries meeting these goals will receive U.S. backing as well. Given the economic and social development content of the millennium goals, Uribe said he was convinced such a process could effectively counter Venezuelan populism. He emphasized that this was the right moment as well, given the many national elections scheduled for 2006 in the region. This would be the right way to influence in a positive way election results, he said.

18. (C) Martinez agreed that a new effort was needed in the region. The U.S. and Colombia had to advocate an agenda that showed a "caring heart" and focused on how people could secure better jobs and better lives. Something more concrete was needed, he said, with results more immediately felt by the average person. Uribe agreed, noting that a social component was critical in Latin America with its deep-rooted poverty.

Uribe's Assessment of the Region and Chavez

19. (C) With so many elections approaching, beginning in December in Bolivia and Chile, Coleman requested Uribe's assessment of the region and of Chavez, in particular. Uribe said the Venezuelans he talks to remained convinced there was cheating in last year's referendum but had no proof. The OAS and Carter Center declared the elections clean. Nonetheless, democracy in the region was threatened. The opposition in Venezuela remained weak and divided and Chavez had the leverage of oil with surging prices. In Bolivia, Evo Morales was gaining in the polls. This was worrying. (Former President and current Presidential candidate) Jorge Quiroga needed to keep his numbers up. This would prevent Chavez from interfering in the elections. In Nicaragua, the liberal party candidates had to unify or Daniel Ortega would win. In Uruguay, Uribe saw no problems with President Vasquez, whom he believed was "a totally decent democrat...an idealistic socialist with understandable concerns on social issues." In Peru, he said there were already two to three candidates but saw no major problems there either. He expressed more concern about Mexico. The Fox government was weak and his party unlikely to win in upcoming presidential elections. The PRI was gaining in the polls, as was the PRD's Lopez Obrador. Uribe admitted that he was not sure how to approach these worrying trends in the region but encouraged Washington policy makers to keep a close eye and work with partners in the region to design the right strategy.

110. (C) On Venezuela, Uribe said he handles relations very carefully. The two countries share a long border with a complicated topography. Bilateral trade could reach \$3 billion in 2005 and many small and medium-sized enterprises depend on sales to Venezuela. At the same time, according to Uribe, Chavez understood that if he did not cooperate in the fight against terrorists, Colombian public forces would enter his territory, seize them and return them back to Colombia. Uribe also said he makes a point not to respond to Chavez's excesses publicly. This would only give him the oxygen he craves, said Uribe.

111. (C) On Ecuador, Uribe said he trusts and has a good relationship with President Palacio but the government was weak. As a result, Colombia had to suffer difficult speeches from the Foreign Minister. Uribe said his foreign minister (Carolina Barco) grew angry at the speeches of her Ecuadorian counterpart, but he continued to tell her to ignore them and be patient. Uribe also said the porous border continued to be a problem as terrorists slipped back and forth. He did not understand why the GOE continued to complain about spraying and demand it be stopped. If the GOC stopped spraying, insisted Uribe, Ecuador would become flooded with drugs. The government was not strong enough to stand up to pressures from "indigenous groups and radical political parties," concluded Uribe.

Demobilization

112. (C) Uribe reviewed the status of ongoing paramilitary demobilizations and the important elements of the new justice and peace law. He said the total number of those demobilized would exceed 20,000 by week's end, 65 percent from paramilitaries, and 35 percent from the guerrilla groups. In six months, he expected to see a total of 25,000 demobilized. He stressed that earlier peace processes with the M-19 and other groups handled only 400 and 2,000, respectively. The sheer number of the current demobilization made it clear how difficult the process will be. But he continued to believe it was the right course. The more we demobilize, he said, the greater the chances that the "ring-leaders" will have less to fight with and that their structures will be dismantled.

13. (C) Uribe acknowledged that the law was controversial but, for the first time, Colombia had successfully introduced the principles of justice and reparations into a peace process. Past laws only dealt with amnesty, without requirements for reparation and justice. He insisted that the law needed to be applied transparently to all illegal armed groups -- paras and guerrillas. He was convinced that those who considered the law too soft on the paras would consider it too hard on the guerrillas.

14. (C) To ensure rigorous implementation of the law, Uribe said Colombia needed a group of eminent persons to monitor progress and provide constructive criticism "when we are not getting it right." Per reftel, he repeated his idea of forming a committee of "friends," led by former President Clinton and a few ex-senators to follow the law's implementation.

Colombia without Uribe

15. (C) Coleman noted that Uribe's leadership had generated great confidence in Washington. As Colombia awaited the decision of its Constitutional Court on whether the president could seek re-election, Coleman wondered whether Uribe was concerned that his priorities could unravel and Colombians and others could lose confidence if he were not able to continue. (Note: Senate SACFO staffers Paul Grove and Thomas Hawkins asked Uribe the same question on August 29. End Note)

16. (C) Uribe said he would speak publicly about the issue when the court ruled and not before. He stated categorically that any action he took following the ruling would be in strict accordance with the constitution. If the Constitutional Court ruled against re-election, he would do his best to convince his supporters to elect a successor who continued the fundamental lines of his policy. Someone who supported the democratic security policy and was determined to fight terrorism, restore investor confidence, generate jobs, and continue the key alliance with the U.S. He noted that there were other, democratic options citizens could consider, if they so chose. For example, some had suggested a national referendum at election time so voters could express their preferences directly. It would be politically controversial, he said, but democratic. Uribe hoped for a decision by the court soon and would weigh his options then.
WOOD

=====CABLE ENDS=====